

# Policing Pakistan's Northwest Frontier: Fasihuddin Interview

*Interviewed by John Whisenhunt, Editor*

**Editorial Abstract:** *Fasihuddin, a senior law enforcement officer, attended the "Voices on Afghanistan" seminar to provide a Pakistani perspective. He discusses the challenges of policing the Afghanistan/Pakistan border regions, and offers recommendations for more effective cultural and technical law enforcement in the region.*

**Views expressed by Fasihuddin are his own, and do not represent the Police Service of Pakistan, nor any official Government of Pakistan position.**

**IO Sphere:** *Can you please set the stage for our readers, and tell us a little about the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), and the challenges you have carrying out security operations there.*

**Fasihuddin:** Pakistan is a federation, and two of the provinces, Baluchistan and the NWFP, are adjacent to Afghanistan. You know there has been war in Afghanistan for many years, first with the Soviets, then the Talib fighting, and the third stage is the War on Terror. We have seven tribal agencies, collectively called "FATA" [Federally Administered Tribal Area], and most of them are adjacent to Afghanistan. The people living on both sides of the border speak the same language, and are mostly of the same ethnic group. The tribal identity means they have strong affinity for one another, so for centuries they have had relationships, often through matrimonial alliances, and many other transactions of a socio-economic nature. So when there is a war in Afghanistan, it is automatically felt in Pakistan, in the tribal areas. There are so many incessant problems caused by the war in Afghanistan, and it has a lot of implications for the people of NWFP and Baluchistan.

As a law enforcement office in NWFP, we have tremendous difficulties. First, we were never trained, like many police forces in the world, for the War on Terror. Police are the front line of defense in any civil society, but most have never been trained for a warlike situation, but today we face that in these two provinces. Plus, we are under equipped,

understaffed, and poorly paid—we have logistical and capacity constraints. In our budget, 88 percent of the money goes to salaries and allowances, leaving only 22 percent for capacity building such as arms and ammunition, which is of course very low. Secondly, since our independence in 1947, the population and crime rate have gone up five and nine times [respectively], but the police force has grown only two times during the same period. Police salaries have never really increased. You would be surprised by how many police officers, who are



*Fasihuddin addresses a village council in the Northwest Frontier Province. (Author)*

entitled to certain kinds of weapons, simply don't have them. So these are some of the difficulties, as well as being less in number and less prepared than the terrorists. And there are certain attitudes by certain former Inspectors General of Police: they did not realize there is a war next door to us! These spillover effects can be felt in many districts. We began to have terrorist attacks in our cities. But they did not try to convince the government, donor agencies, nor the international community, to be prepared for the coming situations. Now in the NWFP, we are experiencing terrorist attacks in greater numbers than the FATA—the tribal areas. Suicide

bombings only numbered six in 2006, now there are 28 in the NWFP, and 71 in the whole country in 2007. We have a big number out of that 71. Yet in that same time frame, the police did not arrest a single suicide bomber. These are challenges we are facing. We have to modify our roles, not just in increasing our numbers and our capacity, but our attitude towards the problem. Police can address such problems by two methods: zero tolerance, which we're not equipped to do; and community policing. Yet, our training, our police academies are not ready. In the past five years when all this was going on, we should have changed our curriculum, but we still use the old colonial system. We've had proposed reforms which have not been implemented. Again, there are many challenges.

**IO Sphere:** *You've had firsthand experience dealing with extremists and their tactics. You've adapted as best you can given the limitations you've described. How have both your own methods and the terrorists' methods evolved? How are they changing their tactics?*

**Fasihuddin:** The terrorists are using the latest techniques, the most modern equipment, the most modern communications gear, so we must revamp the whole police model. Naturally, in times of such rapid change, we must adjust our own attitudes and skills, in a way I call "TASK: T is training; A is attitude; S for skill; K for knowledge." Training means to learn to a certain repeatable level, yet our average constable or rifleman only has a tenth grade education. They are generally unaware of the world situation, and do not know what we mean by the War on Terror—they are not conceptually clear on whom they are fighting. There is

not a single piece of police curriculum about Al Qaeda, or sectarianism. There are codes of law, police rules, things like that. Our police have never been taught about terrorism and suicide bombing, the techniques of terrorists. They think they will be chasing robbers and thieves! Whereas, the situation has changed. Similarly, they are trained with the Kalashnikov rifle, but not with things like computers or bomb disposal. Now there are certain special police teams with these skills, but we need such general training for all police, because these things are everywhere. Every policeman is concerned with a bomb blast here, and in every city. Most of our force is unaware of things like wiretaps, intelligence analysis, money laundering, international crime—none are included in the police syllabus. Ask a line constable [police officer] what is meant by ‘organized crime,’ and he is unable to answer. The man on the street with the rifle is not clear on these topics, and how to fight them. Senior officers have a new course, but senior officers are not fighting on the street, they are managers and policy makers. We have to change for the sake of the man is who chasing terrorists to their hideouts. I don’t know how to use night vision devices, because I am not trained. And the constable, as especially as he is promoted, must know these things. So, we must be technologically equipped and professionally trained to match to the terrorists. And we must change attitudes. Many lesser educated people, even in law enforcement, think we are fighting our own countrymen... they think the Taliban are our friends, our brothers! The whole way we go about things, getting information, intelligence-led policing—we don’t use this yet. The New York Police Department certainly learned this after 9-11, working with major agencies and the Department of Homeland Security. We have intelligence agencies, who are working independently, disparately, but they are not supporting police, and it is very rare for them to let police into their criminal analysis. And we need knowledge: of police work, police culture, as well as world knowledge!

How did police respond in New York, in Norway, in Turkey, in Madrid? What are their computer analysis models? We should study the available modus operandi and police approaches of different countries who are confronted with the same situations. So this is what I mean by our TASK: how we must cope with our challenges.

**IO Sphere:** *In the West, we don’t always seem to understand the cultural and tribal distinctions you’ve described. What group or country seems to be most successful in understanding the situation? Who is a good model?*

**Fasihuddin:** The British ruled India and south Asia for 200 years. When confronted with the Afghan and



*The Northwest Frontier Province region.  
(Wikimedia)*

Pashtun people, they were defeated twice. Then they started studying the culture, history, and geography of that area. I am happy that most of those British officers wrote wonderful books about the Pashtun people, even Pashtun poetry. We have the best of our history in those books. The way the UK soldiers fought the bad guys is marvelous. They built forts, checkpoints on the borders of cities, just to keep the tribal people away. They developed a system where they exercised their influence through local tribal chieftains, by giving them respect, what they call “lungi,” as well as the title of “Malik” [literally “chieftain”]. Again, very respectful, but also entrusting him

with responsibility for keeping order and going after bad guys. Also, they did development work for the local people. Instead of sending their own [British] troops, they hired local forces in the form of frontier constabulary, and they developed a model where the officers developed the policy, but the implementing people, the visible “front” were the local people. That was how they caught the bad guys and provided security in the cities. So that is one successful historical model. In fact, [current] British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has stated they are thinking of using that model again.

I have done this same sort of thing, community policing in my districts, and we were successful in controlling crowds who were demonstrating against the Danish cartoons [depicting the Prophet Mohammed, in 2006]. The city of Peshawar experienced tremendous looting, killings, violent demonstrations. It was a similar case in Lahore, where banks were looted by criminals who crept in among the agitators... but not in district Charsadda. There were 54 different protests and demonstrations in the months of February and March, 2006. But not a single case of disruption or looting took place because we took local leaders into confidence. We told them “you may stage your protests, you may show your anger, but you may not be violent because the chief is with you. If anything happens, it will be on you.” So they cooperated with the police – that is how we do good community policing. Many a time in this War on Terror law enforcement officials have been kidnapped and some were killed – their throats cut. But in some cases, when there is some confidence building between the people and the police, the kidnappers will release them. There is a thing called “Nanewatei,” [a forgiveness process] or regret, in which people go before the “Jergah” [tribal consultative body], tender an apology and ask for a pardon in the name of God. You pay them something, and admit your fault, and you can be forgiven in the local system. Islam endorses this: when someone is repentant, you should forgive him. Yesterday I mentioned the incident

where NATO airstrikes killed 82 small children reciting from the Holy Book, and then suicide bombing started happening in Pakistan as retaliation. Were I the commander of NATO forces at that time, I would have called for a Jergah, asked the bomber pilots to accompany me, and go to that area. I would have told the council: “we were given bad information, we are unhappy over this incident, we are your brothers, we are not against Islam. It was a mistake, we apologize for it.” This would have been a good move, and they (NATO) would have been forgiven by the tribal people. You can do this if such a thing happens again, and see the results.

**IO Sphere:** Which is certainly another reason to better understand the culture. You’ve talked about the importance of dialog. What are your thoughts about inter-faith exchanges, such as between Muslims and Christians?

**Fasihuddin:** I’m a strong supporter of inter-faith dialog, for many reasons. In Arabic, there is a saying [speaks phrase], which means “the strength of a man lies in his intelligence and his tongue.” It does not say it is in your hands. The Holy Book says time and again it is for people who think. [Recites passage from the Quran] “There are signs in this book for those who have intelligence.” I have yet to see a verse in the Holy Book that says: “This book is for those who fight.” I have read it many, many times, when I was in Islamic school [madrasah]. I had an Islamic education because I belong to an Islamic family. The Holy Book says [recites verse from Quran] “All People of the Book, come to a dialog. Come to a point where we share what is common.” We all worship God, so come to this common point. India for example, was conquered by the Muslims in 710 AD. Until the coming of British rule in 1857, India was ruled by Muslims. Yet there were marriages, mixing of families. History does not show Muslim rulers persecuting Hindus. The great Mogul Emperor Akbar was supported by the best ministers, who were Hindu. The best rulers had the support of Hindus and others. We lived there in

relative harmony for centuries, and it was not until the British policy of “divide and rule” that created differences between the faiths. Many books were published with accusations, and no one knew who was publishing what. In 1918 there was the Khilifat Movement [launched by Muslims in India to protect the

Ottoman Caliphate after World War I], but this was stopped by Western interests. In Pakistan, the Father of the Nation Mohammed Ali Jinnah, when he first took charge, was asked by a Hindu scholar about treatment of minorities. He said “I’ll not be the Governor General of Pakistan, I’ll be the Protector General of Minorities!” He said “you are free to go to your mosque, your church, or temple... there is religious freedom.” In the modern era, Pakistan is a Muslim country, but we are surrounded by India and China... Iran and Turkey are Muslim, yes. China has tremendous respect in Pakistan, ask anyone. There is no anti-Chinese feeling there. There might be some in the US, but not in Pakistan. The Japanese are the most respected people in Pakistan. Why? Because they are free thinkers! Now as far as India goes, we don’t have disagreements with them on a religious basis—there are political problems. How many Muslims live in India? About the population of Pakistan. Are they barricaded in? Is India going to “throw them out” to Pakistan? No.

Right now, interfaith dialog is a necessity. Why? Because the War on Terror has been given a color of religiosity. To the uneducated Muslims, it has been painted as a war against their religion. That is the biggest problem of this war. Muslims must be told this is not a war against any religion, or group belonging to any religion. Killing in Islam is forbidden: if a terrorist kills an innocent person, he is not a true Muslim, he is not a true believer! His ID card or passport might be labeled Muslim, but he is not a true believer. We need



*Community policing in action. (Author)*

interfaith dialog, because if religion has the strength to divide people, it must also have the strength to unite people. Religion is a great motivating factor, a great engine to guide people! You need computer networks, media and books to influence people, and the words of great leaders in speeches... but you have a big, influential, powerful tool in your hands. But why haven’t you used it for bringing peace to the world? How many people believe in religion? Millions, maybe billions... most people! So, if they believe in something, they should believe progressively, systematically, for all humanity. People should not believe in something that destroys humanity. Religion is an asset, which unfortunately we cannot use. You use poetry, music to motivate people... why can’t you use religion? That’s why the terrorists have gained on us; they are motivating people with distorted words. We should be ahead of them, using religion in true perspective, to move the people against the terrorists. They are fighting us with something that is very much in their minds: they think they will be praised by Almighty Allah, that the Prophet will receive them in Paradise. This is a force in the hands of bad guys. Yet, where are the counterarguments? We have kept our eyes closed! We must start telling them that bad people are giving false information, that these people are conspirators who have twisted the words of the Prophet... they must be told they are being fooled. The Prophet says if someone attributes something to him that he has not said, that person should seek his place in Hell. We need to show

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skills, knowledge, technique, and explain that these people are going against the words of the Prophet. Religion is a great power in the hands of intellectuals and policymakers, but their advisors and ministers are not well-versed in religion.

The Western media is making a mistake: there is only one religion that is Islam. There are sects, just like in Christianity and Judaism, just like there are tribes in various nationalities. Certainly there are schools of thought, just like in a Western university with different departments: they don't fight, they interact via dialog. But the Western media, due to meager understanding of our culture, says there is "political Islam," "militant Islam," "Islamic terrorism," "radical Islam." How many more words can there be? But, simple Muslim people say "look, the West is propagandizing against us." Now, if you say for instance, look at Mr. So-and-So in a specific group like Al Qaeda, he is a terrorist. Or, there are bad guys in the fighting or combatant part of the Taliban. Then [the people] will understand you are not painting all Islam. If you name a specific group and

call them "bad," you have reservations about their policies and political agenda, well, you have free speech and can call them what you want. What is really meant by terms like "political Islam" or "militant Islam" is that Islam speaks on different aspects of life: Islamic view of politics, Islamic view of society, Islamic concept of history. You can find theses and doctorate work on these topics. But saying there is "militant Islam," we don't know that. The Prophet says Muslims do not use their hands or their tongues against other believers. The Holy Book says peace is the best. So where are these people getting "militant Islam" from the Holy Book?

**IO Sphere:** *Unfamiliarity with the proper expressions hurts everyone in this situation. And we often look for the differences rather than common elements among faiths.*

**Fasihuddin:** Yes, like the cartoon issue [Danish newspaper depiction of Prophet Mohammed], and how we controlled this situation. We asked the international community for interfaith

dialog, and many people have written about it. There are similarities, because the truth has been revealed unto many: Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, the Tribes. We don't distinguish who is better; all have had knowledge and powers revealed to them, but we are not supposed to judge among them, who is greater, who is smaller. The same is true for modern scholars, for example, Radhakrishnan was a great person. I respect him tremendously. He was a great scholar, a teacher at Oxford University [UK], and he was the President of India. We must read his books and teachings about religion, the importance of religion. I have quoted many times from his books in my work, and you can see in his works how religion can be used for the betterment of mankind. Again, the question is how well we can use it.

**IO Sphere:** *Thank you very much. I don't want to keep you from the seminar any longer, so we should get you back there.*

**Fasihuddin:** Yes, thank you very much. 